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## REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

*Problems of the Self.* JOHN LAIRD. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd. 1917. Pp. xii + 375.

In a recent number of the *Unpopular Review* there is a criticism, well supported by quotation, and for the most part well deserved, on the obscurity, the wilful obscurity of philosophers. There are, however, some of the old masters who belie this report, and occasionally our contemporaries deign to express themselves in language that can be understood. One example of this greatly desired trait is Professor Laird's *Problems of the Self*. Indeed, so clearly and comprehensibly is it written that, barring one or two chapters, it could be read with interest even by those guiltless of technical philosophical study. Part of this clearness is due to a careful discrimination and explanation of terms. There is detailed analysis of the different senses in which important words have been used, and clear statement of the sense in which the author intends to use them. Another characteristic which makes the book a pleasure to read is its constant use of summary and forecast, the statement of the point reached in the argument, together with the line to be followed in its further development.

Professor Laird's theme lies in the question, "What is the Self?"

It is a question badly in need of asking and of full and free discussion. Convictions, opinions and prejudices, openly expressed or lurking as tacit presuppositions in our philosophical literature, are of the greatest variety, ranging from the denial that the self is anything more than a verbal abstraction to the assertion that it is the only reality, eternal, unchangeable, and frequently unknowable. The whole subject has long been greatly in need of the thorough overhauling that is here given it, and if there are more questions raised than answered, this but justifies the title of the book.

In all questions concerning the self, Professor Laird takes his stand firmly on introspection as the only unchallengeable authority. Whether the self prove eventually to be more, or less, than experience, its study must start with an analysis of experience as it is found. The first problem is, therefore, "to consider, as precisely as possible, what experiences are, and then to discuss their relation to, or their union in, the self."<sup>1</sup> In accepting the traditional division of consciousness into "cognition, endeavor, and feeling," Professor Laird provides a careful analysis of what is covered by each of these terms. In no case must experience be understood to include the objects of experience. In common with many other modern realists, Professor Laird emphasizes strongly the distinction between the act of being aware and the object of the awareness. The act is a part of consciousness, but the object is a "presentation," which is neither mental nor physical. The argument seems based on the apparent absurdity of saying that the mind, when viewing, for instance, an old cathedral, is gray and stony. But is this not, after all, a merely verbal *impasse*? Is it not simpler and closer to introspection to say that what is found in perception is not the conscious act plus a presentation, which is produced somehow by the cooperation of the mind and the physical object, but rather a direct relation between subject and object, the self modified in certain definite ways in response to an outside stimulus?

This distinction between act and object is, however, necessary, if cognition is to be brought into line with endeavor and feeling defined as acts of reference to an object. "The primary and fundamental characteristic of a conscious experience is its reference to an object. This, I think, is the only common characteristic of that which is psychical."<sup>2</sup> This definition of consciousness is still open to question, even after Professor Laird's detailed argument in its favor. It does not sufficiently differentiate conscious facts from some that are not usually considered such. Magnetic attraction, for example, might easily be defined as motion in reference to an object,

<sup>1</sup> P. 14.

<sup>2</sup> P. 33.

and the tropisms of plants are essentially acts of reference to the stimuli. This definition also results in rather unsatisfactory descriptions of some psychical facts, perception as has been suggested, and physical pain in particular. The act of feeling the pain must be considered as something different from the pain felt. The latter, the presentation, standing midway between the cause, which is physical, and the feeling, which is psychical, is itself neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring.

The analysis of experience shows that it is composed of these various acts of reference, not existing separately or independently, but "fused and blended together." It is this mass, of feeling, will, and cognition, of present, past, and future, of clear consciousness, marginal consciousness, and subconsciousness, which makes up the self. "Detached experiences, if they exist, are not a self. To be parts of a self they must conspire together with other experiences to form an individual, continuous unity."<sup>3</sup> Professor Laird shows convincingly that the self is not primarily willing or feeling or knowing, but is essentially a whole, of which these phases are convenient but superficial abstractions. The main problem, then, is to discover the underlying principle of this unity. It is necessary, however, to guard against exaggerating the degree of unity and continuity found in normal selves. There is unity, but there is also discord and self-contradiction; there is continuity, in memory, in habits and dispositions, but there is also forgetfulness, and sometimes abrupt change in character. The precise degree of unity and continuity essential to a self tends to become a matter of definition. There would seem to be groups of loosely organized experiences below the grade of selfhood; and self, again, is a wider term than personality which implies purpose and responsibility.

If Professor Laird's conclusion, his solution of the problem, is the least persuasive part of his book, this is, perhaps, not surprising. Solutions have a way of satisfying only their fashioners. The explanation of the nature of soul or self begins with its traditional definition as an immaterial substance, existing in time. "Immaterial" is rejected as a purely negative characteristic, "existing in time" assumes the reality of time which is not here under discussion. This leaves us with "substance" alone as the definition of soul, and the meaning of substance must be ascertained. After a discussion of other senses in which it is used, substance is interpreted as "existent reality." Reality, which means objectivity, "controlling or limiting thought," is a much wider term than existence. According to Professor Laird, existence refers to those realities of which we have evidence through the senses. This definition, though frankly

<sup>3</sup> P. 213.

elevating chimeras, centaurs and the phantoms of our dreams to the rank of existent realities, might be accepted if it could bring order into the generally chaotic conceptions of existence and reality. But, as Professor Laird admits, it is not a great help in the argument, since it is practically supplanted by the conception of the "particular." This means, first, not a universal, second, having a specific unity of its qualities, which constitutes its form, and, third, including matter, "stuff," as well as form. In the case of physical things this matter, or "raw material," is dependent for definition on the point of view. Iron, which is substance from one standpoint, is matter from another.<sup>4</sup> The matter of which the soul or self is composed is experience. "The fact that there are selves is the fact that every experience forms part, and must form part, of an individual, specific, particular unity."<sup>5</sup> This unity, however, must not be interpreted too literally. The unity of a certain definite train of thought or action is much more close and meaningful than that of the self of which it is a part. The experiences are substances which exist as part of the other substance, the self. "The existence of all of them in a unity through time (though perhaps with intervals) is the soul, the psychical substance."

It is difficult to see how, except in form, this conception differs from that of the "psychology without a soul," which Professor Laird apparently rejects. It does not differentiate between a self and a single experience, or between a self and a society of selves, except by the difference in the amount of material organized. Even the most radical critic of the conception of self would admit that there is a certain degree of unity in one person's experience. The argument against considering the body as part of the self by no means disproves the possibility that the body or the nervous system might be the basis of this unity. He offers no alternative unifying principle beyond the fact that the unity exists.

Perhaps the most characteristic, and certainly one of the most interesting, features of *Problems of the Self* is its large-minded tolerance of unsettled issues. This results in frequent suggestion of interesting bypaths for research or argument. The discussion of multiple personality is brief but clear and pertinent.<sup>6</sup> The possibility that the same experience may be shared by different selves; that the soul might have an intermittent rather than absolutely continuous existence; the criticism of monistic idealism on the ground that the more inclusive unity is also the less organized and less meaningful; the relation between identity and change: all are touched upon more or less lightly, but suggestively and without prejudgment.<sup>7</sup> There is

<sup>4</sup> P. 347.

<sup>5</sup> P. 366.

<sup>6</sup> Chap. 11.

little dogmatism and no narrow prejudice, but an evident willingness to consider all ideas and theories on their own ground.

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*Epistemology.* P. COFFEY. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1917. Vol. I., pp. xiv + 374. Vol. II., pp. viii + 376.

This book is an excellent example of the sort of work being done at Maynooth, Stonyhurst, and Louvain by the reviewers of scholasticism. It is dedicated to Cardinal Mercier and, in spite of slight divergences, is typical of the standpoint of the school of which he was the patron. In other words, it represents Thomism or moderate realism, a view encouraged by Leo XIII.

After carefully reading the present volumes, the reviewer must admit that he has been impressed by the wealth of reading implied by the topics examined and the references given. While not competent to judge the adequacy of the treatment of the Catholic literature on epistemology, he sees reason to hold that the author is completely at home in Neo-scholasticism. Moreover, Dr. Coffey has not neglected modern movements, although his references are seldom to periodical literature. He has evidently been impressed by Prichard's excellent work on Kant, with which he seems largely to agree. I can not help feeling that it is a good sign when a manual of this kind refers to James, Schiller, Wundt, Peirce, Dewey, Bergson and others of their kind. But the standpoint is frankly that of Aristotelian Scholasticism.

The contents of the first volume can be indicated only very briefly. In the Introduction he maintains that epistemology is really a part of metaphysics. Its function is to complete and consolidate metaphysics. The remaining chapters concern themselves with such enquiries as these: The Terms and Data of Epistemology, Its Scope and Instruments, Necessary Judgments, Moderate Realism, Extreme Realism, Nominalism, Conceptualism. It is to be noticed that he pays more attention to Kant than to any other modern thinker "because most of the modern theories draw their inspiration directly or indirectly from principles propounded in the *Critiques*."

What will strike the American reader, used to a brief manual, is the leisurely way in which all conceivably relevant topics are taken up and discussed *pro* and *con*. In many of these discussions there is evidenced good analytic ability and balance of mind. Thus, we have carefully worked out distinctions between irresistible certitude and freely formed convictions; between truth, error, and ignorance; between doubt, opinion, conviction, certitude, belief, and faith. Still